

26 | ADC Hooked & Booked

There are Lit Fests taking place all over the country, but the community of readers is dwindling. Still, passionate book lovers would like to know what others like themselves are reading. This Book Nook suggests some books, but would also like to connect with serious readers, or even casual airport book browsers. Do write in about books you have loved or hated and why. The best entries will be shared on this page. Please send your recommendations to adc.booknook@gmail.com

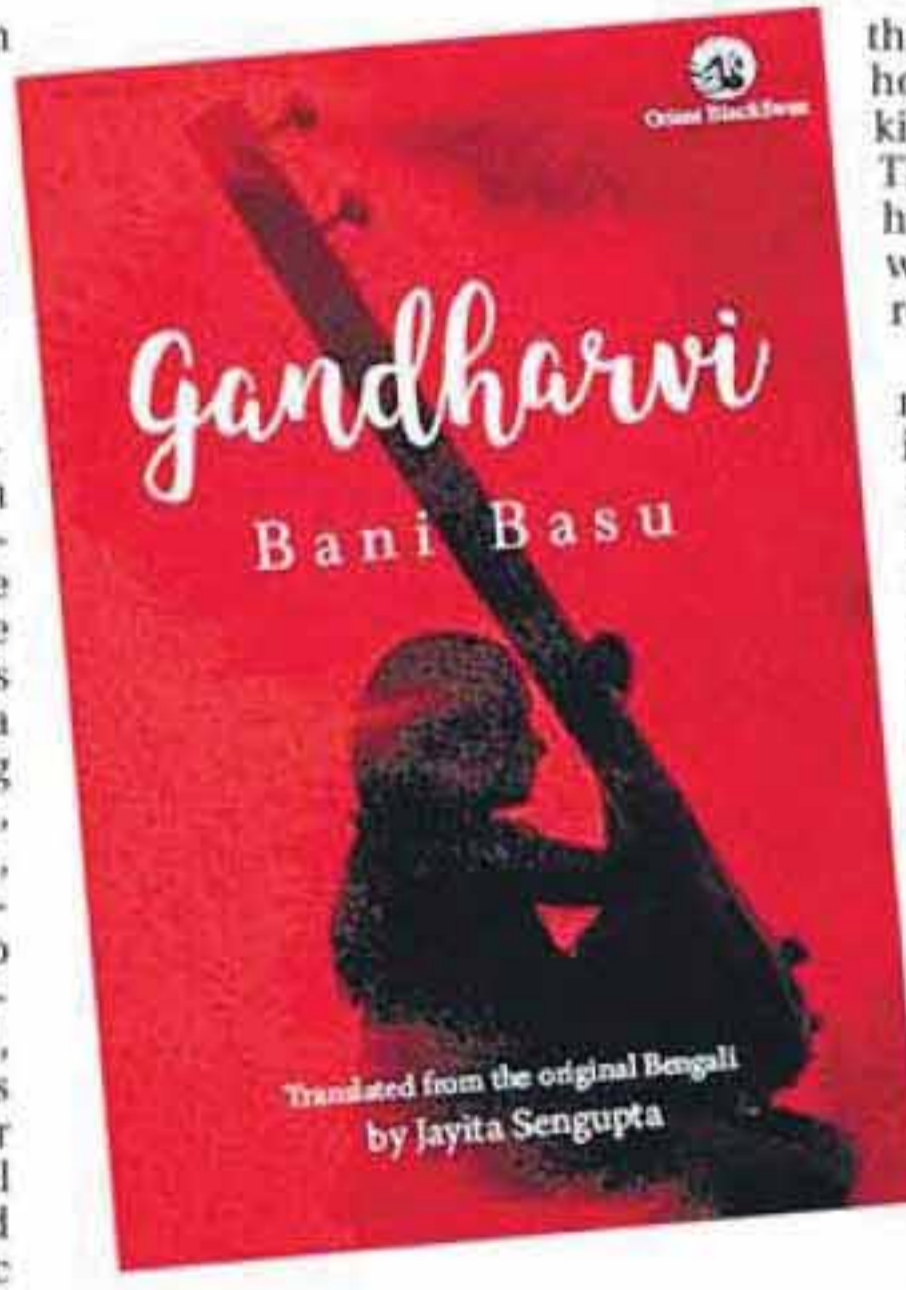
MUSIC, FRIENDSHIP AND LOVE

THE English translation of Sahitya Akademi Award-winning novelist Bani Basu's 1993 novel *Gandharvi* has been released. The translation by Jayita Sengupta is titled *Gandharvi*, and has a preface by musicologist and music critic, Meena Banerjee.

For those who have not been following contemporary Bengali literature, it is a good way to catch up. *Gandharvi* (and there is an explanation of the term in the preface) is about a young woman, Apala, who belongs to an old-fashioned, middle-class family, that does not understand or value her passion for classical music. Her mother is widowed and under the thumb of her autocratic elder brother-in-law. Apala's brother is getting set to become a



DEEPA GAHLOT
Book Nook



the oppressive atmosphere at home. Apala learns from a kindly tutor, Rameshwar Thakur, who wants the best for her, but even he cannot break walls of tradition that surround her.

The book begins with Apala rushing off home after participating in a very important music competition, in which she excels, but comes second. The gathering of music scholars and connoisseurs recognises in her a rare talent, and she is offered a prestigious scholarship to study with a great musician.

Her uncle, however, frowns at the idea of her going to Lucknow and learning from a "tawaif", and forces her to get married. Her husband-to-be heard her singing at the concert and decided to marry her. Apala is not a beauty, nor is she outgoing and charming; so even though she

would rather devote her life to music, she is not given the option.

Apala is meek by temperament, but when, just before her wedding, her friend Soham, also a singer and pupil of Rameshwar, has a nervous breakdown, she helps in his treatment by going over and singing for him till he recovers. In a fit of jealous rage, Soham had attacked his guru's daughter, Mitul, and injured her. It is only Apala's care that helps Soham recover fully.

In her marital family, she is given a kind of limited independence, that allows her to sing on radio and Doordarshan, but she is also expected to be a model housewife. She gives birth to three children and loses her edge, while Soham and Mitul go on to achieve fame and fortune singing popular songs.

For the protagonist of a novel, Apala is rather bloodless—she submits to whatever fate throws at her, whether it is a forced marriage, marital rape, her mother-in-law's interference in the upbringing of her children, or even the hostility of her kinds towards her pursuit of

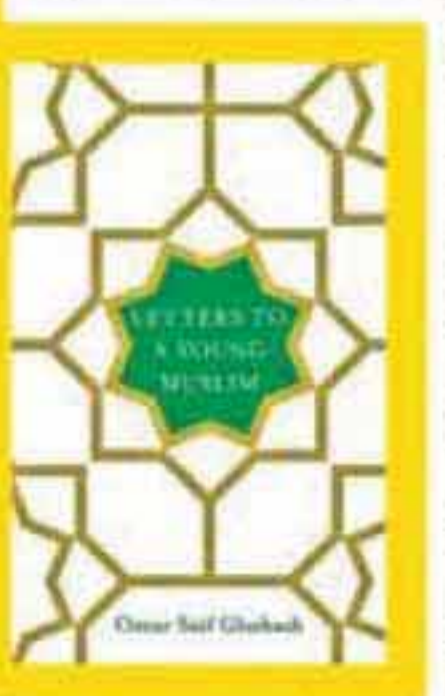
music. The more complex character seems to be her husband Shibnath, who is caring and supportive on the one hand, and an unrecognisable monster on the other. Apala's friend Dipali and her doctor husband Bidyut are quite superfluous to the narrative, so is Mitul's dance partner Shekharan.

What Basu has done is captured the world of classical and popular music, even a bit of cinema and dance. The translation keeps to the usage of Indian English, but could have done with some more careful editing, for example terms like "business magnet" could have been corrected; some terms like horsetail instead of the more popular pony tail, are jarring. But the Bengali milieu and the period come across well; there is also a helpful glossary of musical terms at the end. Classical music lovers would undoubtedly appreciate the book.

• **Gandharvi**
By Bani Basu
Translated by Jayita Sengupta
Pages: 288

ALSO RECEIVED

A BOOK like *Letters To A Young Muslim* has just the moderate voice that is needed at a time when Islamophobia is at a peak. Omar Saif Ghobash is somewhat disturbed to find his young son learn a rigid form of Islam and school and writes this series of letter to the child, hoping to make him understand what Islam is all about, and why the hijacking of the religion by a radical few should not colour his understanding of what it means to be a Muslim today. A must-read. The synopsis states, "From the Ambassador of the UAE to



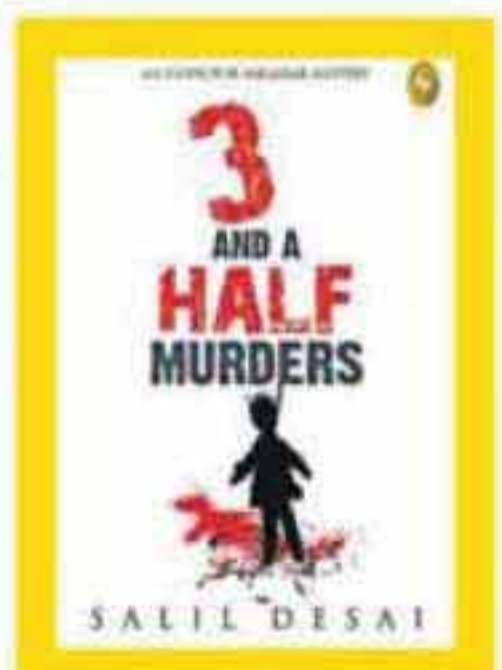
Russia comes a bold and intimate exploration of what it means to be a Muslim in the twenty-first century. In a series of personal letters to his sons, Omar Saif Ghobash offers a short and highly readable manifesto that tackles our current global crisis with the training of an experienced diplomat and the personal responsibility of a father. Today's young Muslims will be tomorrow's leaders, and yet too many are vulnerable to extremist propaganda that seems omnipresent in our technological age. The burning question, Ghobash argues, is how moderate Muslims

can unite to find a voice that is true to Islam while actively and productively engaging in the modern world. What does it mean to be a good Muslim?

What is the concept of a good life? And is it acceptable to stand up and openly condemn those who take the Islamic faith and twist it to suit their own misguided political agendas? In taking a hard look at these seemingly simple questions, Ghobash encourages his sons to face issues others insist are not relevant, not applicable, or may even be Islamophobic. These letters serve as a clear-eyed inspiration for the next generation of Muslims to understand how to be faithful to their religion and still navigate through the complexities of today's world. They also reveal an intimate glimpse into a world many are unfamiliar with and offer to provide an understanding of the everyday struggles Muslims face around the globe."

• **Letters To A Young Muslim**
By Omar Saif Ghobash
Publisher: Pan MacMillan
Pages: 272

THE new Inspector Saralkar mystery by Salil Desai hits the stands. The synopsis reads, "When the case comes their way, Senior Inspector Saralkar has just been diagnosed with hypertension and PSI Motkar is busy with rehearsals of an amateur play. What appears at first to be a commonplace crime by a debt-ridden, cuckolded husband, who has killed his unfaithful wife and then hung himself, soon

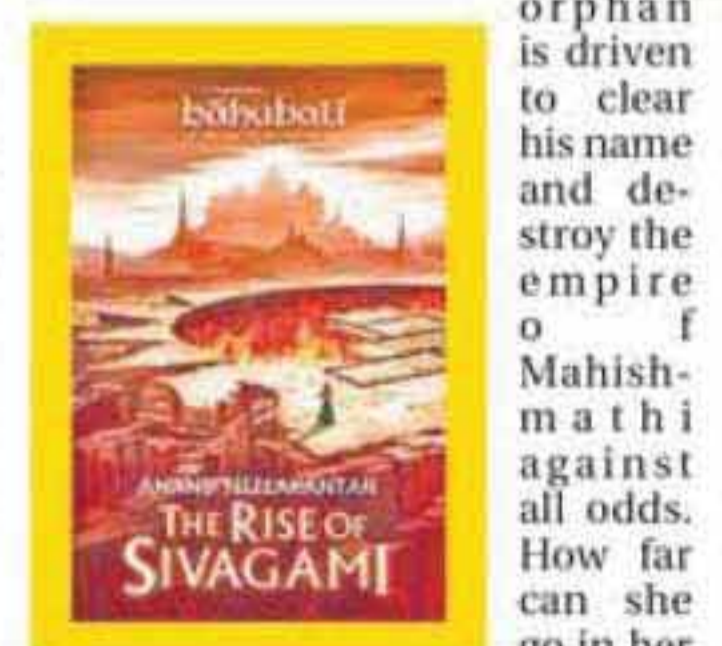


begins to unfold as a baffling mystery. As clues point to a seven-year-old unsolved murder in Bangalore and other leads emerge closer home, Saralkar and Motkar find themselves investigating shady secrets, bitter grudges, fishy land deals, carnal desires, the dead woman Anushka Doshi's sinister obsession with past life regression and her husband's links to a suspicious, small-time god-man, Rangdev Baba. And then, suddenly, the murderer resurfaces and yet another life is in grave danger. . . Can Saralkar and Motkar get to the bottom of an unimaginably shocking motive and stop the malevolent killer from committing the fourth murder. . . ?

• **3 And A Half Murders**
By Salil Desai
Publisher: Fingerprint
Pages: 327

AS Baahubali 2: The Conclusion gets set for a release, Anand Neelakantan's novel, *The Rise of Sivagami* Book 1, that is a prequel to *Bahubali* is out for readers to read the epic take in three parts. The synopsis reads, "Blessed by the sacred Gauriparvat, Mahishmathi is an empire of abundance. The powerful kingdom is flourishing

under its king, who enjoys the support and loyalty of his subjects, down to his lowly slaves. But is everything really as it appears, or is the empire hiding its own dirty secret? Orphaned at a young age and wrenched away from her foster family, Sivagami is waiting for the day she can avenge the death of her beloved father, cruelly branded a traitor. Her enemy? None other than the king of Mahishmathi. With unflinching belief in her father's innocence, the fiery young orphan



is driven to clear his name and destroy the empire of Mahishmathi against all odds. How far can she go in her audacious journey? From the pen of masterful storyteller and best-selling author Anand Neelakantan, comes *The Rise of Sivagami*, the first book in the series *Bahubali: Before the Beginning*. A tale of intrigue and power, revenge and betrayal, the revelations in *The Rise of Sivagami* will grip the reader and not let go."

• **The Rise of Sivagami : Book 1**
By Anand Neelakantan
Publisher: Westland
Pages: 474

FOR young readers of chick lit comes this quick-read novel by Andaleeb Wajid. Says the synopsis,



"Love comes in all tastes and spices! Twenty-six-year-old Aliya loves almost everything to do with food-eating it, styling it, photographing it. But while her career as a food photographer is on track, her personal life is entirely derailed. Determined to move out of her parents' home, she agrees to marry Kamaal, the hot owner of the trendy new restaurant in town. But why does she feel like she's waded into a bowl of bland khichri? Where's the papad, dammit? Where's the crunch factor? Then, on the day of her engagement, she finds out that the celebrated chef at Kamaal's restaurant is none other than Sameer, an old crush from her younger days. Aliya cannot believe that, even after a decade, he's still as hot as jalapeno poppers and as charming as cheesecake and that she's as attracted to him now as she was all those years ago. What is Aliya to do now? Should she go ahead with the wedding and settle for a Milky Bar-like relationship with Kamaal or should she choose rocky road pie and explore her possibilities with Sameer?"

• **The Crunch Factor**
By Andaleeb Wajid
Publisher: Hachette
Pages: 262